

Notes for June 7 draft. June 6, 1985 (see file Freeze85)

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2. Is the difference just a matter of priority between issues of nuclear war and other issues, such as the economy, or personality? Do opinions about nuclear war, even when they are in the same direction as our own (activists), reflect, for most of the public, a low level of concern? That doesn't seem consistent with polled ratings of the importance or salience of the subject of nuclear war as being almost equal to, or at any rate second only to the economy. Or with the belief of 38% of the public that nuclear war is likely within a decade. These attitudes suggest that concern is relatively high; so there must be some differences of a fundamental sort on some premises bearing on how to deal with the problem.

These would include the belief, in a significant fraction of the public, that there wasn't much difference between Mondale and Reagan on the issue of the Freeze; that included the dismaying mistaken belief on the part of many that Reagan supported the Freeze, but otherwise it may not have been so far wrong. (We may have been more mistaken in overrating Mondale's commitment to the Freeze, and especially, to a Moratorium). In other words, many or most of the public may have inferred--especially from his performance in the second debate--that Mondale wasn't particularly "for" the Freeze, any more than Reagan. But that doesn't account for the whole divergence.

2. Such differences do not show up in the set of opinions on which Yankelovich finds great consensus among the public; on almost all of these, the public agrees strongly with us activists, in sharp disagreement with Reagan's views as expressed in 1981-82. (Consequently, Reagan has changed his tune on these, whether or not he has changed his opinions; so this divergence did not hurt Reagan much in the 1984 election. We probably underrated the effect on the electorate of Reagan's change in rhetoric in 1984; perhaps we were more cynical about the likelihood of a real, sincere change. It is noteworthy that he had not expressed these "wild hawk" views of 1981-82 in 1980, running for election; but even if he had, public opinion on these matters has changed sharply, in our direction, since 1980, and even since 1982.)

Incidentally, what Yankelovich found in discussions with "experts" is that, in effect, many of them shared with Reagan the views on nuclear war that are in such sharp divergence with the

public's, and ours. To put it another way, Reagan's views of 1981-82 that were so shocking to the European and American public were actually in line with the private views of many "experts," not merely Reagan Administration officials!

3. Nor are the divergences obvious in other parts of Yankelovich's survey, the questions on which he finds conflict or uncertainty in the public. My guess is that the real differences concern questions that he did not ask directly. Moreover, they involve questions that we do not often ask directly of our hearers, issues that we do not emphasize in our presentations to the public: so that we have failed to discover by their answers or responses the extent of the difference between our own judgements on these matters and our hearers'.

These have to do, first, with the willingness to risk nuclear war, or to **threaten** US nuclear first-use--as distinct from definitely engaging in it--in order to prevent Soviet domination of the U.S. or Western Europe.

Second, the acceptability of weapons developments that serve to enhance the credibility of such threats...and of risks (perhaps underestimated) associated with such developments and threats.

Third, the significance of differences between the Freeze (and the Moratoria we have proposed) and official U.S. negotiating proposals such as SALT-II, START, INF, Build-down and SDI.

Fourth, the relation of the arms race, and of the Freeze or Moratoria that would halt it, to the raising or lowering of the risks of nuclear war. Likewise, the adequacy of "talking to the Russians" (without making negotiable proposals or reaching agreements that halt any of the new weapons) as a means of lowering the risk of nuclear war.

In particular, the dangers posed by specific new weapons now being tested or about to be tested (MX, D5, P-II, SLCMs, ASAT, SDI): in raising risks of escalation in a nuclear exchange that may have commenced with U.S. first-use; risks of preemption by one side or the other, after such first-use or escalation; and encouragement to similar and further destabilizing systems on the Soviet side, and to proliferation among other countries.

All of these bear on the **urgency** of the Freeze, or broad Moratoria, or of individual campaigns against these specific weapons. On many of these judgments, my own opinions probably differ from those of many Freeze activists and other arms controllers--in a direction that leads to a greater sense of urgency--just as Freeze activists differ in that same direction from the mass of the public.

In order to escape from a focus on individual weapons systems to be opposed--and rather than defining broad classes of particularly dangerous weapons--the Freeze emphasized the need to "halt the nuclear arms race" altogether, without distinctions

among weapons or their characteristics. This had the advantage of simplicity in communication, and avoidance of the complex, often arid and repellent, "scholastic" analyses of the traditional arms controllers. It also appealed to the motive of reducing **costs**, on the plausible grounds that no new weapons were necessary and all were wastefully expensive.

But in retrospect, this approach encouraged many supporters of the Freeze to believe--as polls have revealed they did believe--that the **only** significant function of a Freeze would be to reduce costs, to save money. ("Talking to the Russians" heads the public's list of how to reduce the risks of nuclear war; the Freeze is low or absent!) This does not convey a sense of urgency!

After all, by deliberately eschewing distinctions between better and worse nuclear weapons, between more and less dangerous additions, by emphasizing total numbers of existing weapons and the dangers of "the race" without distinction between earlier phases and the current or imminent one, our presentations have suggested that "one nuclear weapon is as bad as another" (which is, in fact, what many Freeze activists, including some experts, believe). But if that is so...how could it make a radical difference in risk to add a few hundred more, (like the Euromissiles), or even a few thousand more (like the MX or D5)?

If total numbers and "overkill" are what matter, and both are so excessive that even reducing by several thousand warheads would neither raise nor lower our risks perceptibly --which we often imply--then why should the public suppose that **adding** several thousand warheads would sharply **increase** the danger of nuclear war?

The answer is that these new weapons do have different characteristics from the earlier and current ones--in accuracy, yield, and/or short flight time, or difficulty in verifiability--that do make a sharp difference, increasing **mutual** US/SU risks: and all the more so when they are imitated and lead to countermeasures on the Soviet side. But we have not made this point prominently. Although it is often mentioned in a list of reasons for the Freeze, it is rarely highlighted or **explained** (and it needs explaining); and it is tacitly contradicted by the simpler notions mentioned above, which dominate our slogans.

The effect has been to obscure the urgent importance of achieving a Freeze--or more specifically, a halt to this whole class of particularly dangerous developments--"immediately" (as of 1980) or as soon as possible, **before** these particular weapons were tested or deployed, or their momentum became unstoppable on both sides. The actual urgency of the Freeze made it highly important, in fact, that Reagan not be elected in 1980; failing that, that he not be reelected in 1984 (along with all the other reasons!). Not only did we fail to achieve either of these (in company with others): it would appear that few voters were primarily

influenced in their choice by this particular consideration. This was a real failure for us. I suspect that a failure of our approach to convey a sense of time-urgency was a major factor in this, and that the characteristic of our campaign described above contributed to this.

All the issues mentioned above bear on another question we failed to address directly: "What is second-best to a bilateral Freeze?" What should our nuclear arms programs be in the absence of, or prior to, a negotiated, mutual, comprehensive US/Soviet Freeze?

Here again, had we asked that question, I think we would have found a considerable difference between our Freeze activists and much of the public: i.e., many of those who told pollsters they supported a Freeze. Yankelovich's data suggests indirectly what political behavior seems to suggest: in the absence of a bilateral halt--**whatever the reasons for that lack, whether Soviet intransigence or our President's--**"we have no choice" but to follow the "prudent" path of pursuing technological improvements wherever they lead, "imitating" Soviet developments if they seem to be ahead in any dimension, making sure that we do not "lose" the arms race even if it is infeasible to "win" it.

In other words, an essentially unrestrained nuclear arms race--within the generous limits of existing agreements--is second-best to a so-far-unachieved bilateral Freeze, is "optimal" under current conditions, in the eyes of many of our "supporters" in the public (as it is, we found somewhat earlier, for many "supporters" in Congress. They may, after all, be representative of their constituents! (sob)).

Good
There is an important exception to this, highly favorable to our cause: 61% of the public, Yankelovich found, would favor a six-month moratorium on nuclear weapons development, to see if the Soviets would join. Such a Moratorium, presumably imposed by Congress (certainly not by Reagan) appears the most hopeful possibility in the next four years; and such a Congressional initiative would appear to have the support of the public. (On the other hand, whether that could be relied on in the face of Reagan's opposition is another matter). But Congress is scarcely showing, yet, any heart to take on the President to that extent. A comparable Soviet initiative might well change the environment for such Congressional action decisively; probably nothing else would.

Altogether, Yankelovic was wrong--as we were--in believing that there was an overwhelming public consensus on the risks of the arms race. His own data did not support that; he misinterpreted it. Rather, it showed a consensus on the overwhelming risks associated with an actual nuclear war, whether initially "limited" or not. There is no consensus--no overwhelming agreement with our own views--on the relation of the

current arms race to changes in the risk of nuclear war occurring, or on the best negotiating proposals (given that we do negotiate) or on the kinds of agreements--or other developments--that would best lower the risks of nuclear war. And there is, regrettably, majority support for the kinds of threats of nuclear first-use--even though the public believes they should be bluffs--that have plausibly rationalised our actual weapons buildup in every administration since 1945 and are doing so today. A challenge to us is to expose that link and to change that support to resistance.

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